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ABSTRACT

The first step in developing the honors program at North Arkansas Community College (NACC) involved establishing the following four program objectives: (1) to develop students' skills in critical thinking, research, and the application of knowledge; (2) to explore the historical, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds of disciplines; (3) to foster the synthesis of knowledge through interdisciplinary courses; and (4) to encourage self-guided study. After the objectives were established, data for a profile of NACC students were gathered, and an evaluation of the existing curriculum was made. Support was enlisted from interested faculty and from key administrators. The Vice-President of Instruction appointed an honors coordinator to administer the program in conjunction with an advisory board made up of the vice-president, faculty and community members, and a student. The program now consists of honors sections in general education (e.g., English Composition, General Psychology, and Oral Communication), as well as courses entitled Individual Projects, History of Ideas, and Great Books. In addition to courses, the program sponsors field trips, seminars, and guest speakers. Classes are limited to 15 students, and each student is assigned a faculty mentor who acts as a personal counselor. All students with less than 12 hours of college credit, who have an American College Test composite score of 22, and who maintain a 3.3 grade point average are invited to participate in the program. Other students may apply through a personal interview. A detailed description of the program administration, an itemization of the program budget, and a list of the director's duties are included. (PAA)

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Tailoring an Honors Program to Your Institution

by Marty Terrill

North Arkansas Community College

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Tailoring an Honors Program to Your Institution

Honors education is an elusive creature; when I began my pursuit of honors education I began to think I was indeed on a snipe hunt. To complicate matters further, honors programs are at best chameleons; they look different according to their environment. Nowhere could I find "the" honors program. As I read, studied, and observed, I became convinced an honors program made sense only if it were developed for its environment, tailored specifically for the institution it was to serve. Every institution has the potential for an honors program. The success of the program depends upon its operating withing the overall structure and meeting the needs of the specific institution.

North Arkansas Community College, Harrison, AR, developed an honors program over a four-year period. I was on the planning committee and was appointed coordinator of the program when the committee disbanded. The first year we spent studying, reading, observing, and asking endless questions. The hardest questions were the ones we asked ourselves: what did we want from an honors program, whom did we want to reach, how was it to fit in our overall purpose--questions that had to be answered before we could do any work on the program itself.

We wanted the program to capitalize on the strengths of the faculty, to enrich learning for students and faculty participating in the program, and to spread its effects to the rest of the institution. Because NACC serves a rural, relatively isolated area with approximately one-third of the 1100 students non-traditional, we decided our honors program should expose students to issues of national concern through the media of critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary studies, cultural literacy strategies, and collaborative learning. The program emphasizes four objectives:

1) to develop skills in critical thinking, research, and application of knowledge
2) to explore historical, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds of disciplines
3) to foster synthesis of knowledge through interdisciplinary courses
4) to encourage self-guided study

Establishing these objectives is the first step: the institution must know what the program is to accomplish.

Once this decision had been made, the second step was to study our own institution. At NACC we began with developing a profile of our students. We gathered information for the past two years. For entering freshmen we wanted to know ACT scores, high school grade point average, and what high school. For our graduating students, we wanted to know grade point average, how many transferred, and to which school. Based on this information we established entry and retention requirements.

We then studied our curriculum. Since we had to be economically feasible, we looked at courses with an enrollment of 100 or more students per semester, courses that transfer, and courses required for degrees. We also looked at what instructors were doing: what kinds of tests--the advent of the scanner has spawned a baby boom in multiple choice tests, what field trips, what type labs, what papers, what seminars--anything we could find out about what was already going on in classes and extracurricular activities. We wanted a picture of what was happening to our students campus wide. Our purpose was to supplement, not supplant.

Since NACC is a community college, we were particularly concerned about student attitudes. We did surveys to find out why students were at NACC, what they thought they were missing by attending a two year, commuter college, what activities they were involved in or would like to be involved in, good and bad experiences, and instructors with whom they had problems. In a second survey limited to students on the Dean's List, we asked students about honors: were they interested, what would motivate them to try honors, were they in a high school honors organization, and what disciplines or opportunities they would like to see at NACC. We used this information to get an idea of the level of participation we could anticipate and what would appeal to the students. Needless to say, many things faculty thought were great, the students thought reeked!

The most sensitive area and perhaps the most difficult to handle was faculty. We discovered very quickly everyone wanted to control the honors program. We wanted the program to be interdisciplinary, independent of departmental control; thus, our coordinator reports to the Vice-President of Instruction. Instructors just as quickly fell into four easily identified groups: those who wanted to teach honors because those students could teach themselves and the instructor needed not work; those who clamored to teach honors because those students could finish college in one semester; those who wanted nothing to do with honors and could not wait to announce that fact; and finally those who thought , "Wow! What an opportunity!" The planning committee asked this last group to begin considering course outlines and teaching methods. At this point, the amount of work required to develop an honors class weeded out all but the most dedicated instructors.

Budget was our next consideration. Being cost effective is practically an oxymoron in any field of education; nevertheless, honors people still will hear that phrase. We broke our costs into start up and maintenance costs. We decided to ask for nothing but pure gold in abundance, based on the principle that after the euphoria of having a new program wore off, we would get nothing more. Fortunately,we had the support of our Vice-President of Instruction. The honors program must have the support of someone who can reach the purse strings; I recommend enlisting that support early.

After we had collected all this information about NACC, we decided to step back and study some more. We requested copies of programs at other institutions, both two and four year , we requested course outlines of classes that have been successful elsewhere, we read everything we could find on the characteristics of gifted students, and we studied evaluation procedures used in honors and other special programs. At this point we joined the National Collegiate Honors Council and requested literature from them. We also sent a representative to the NCHC conference.

Now we were ready for the nuts and bolts of the program. We decided the program would be administered by an honors coordinator appointed by the Vice-President of Instruction; an advisory board consisting of the coordinator, the vice-president, two faculty members, two people from the community, and one student would be the policy making body. The coordinator and the instructor would develop course outlines together; all course outlines had to be approved by the Advisory Board. The coordinator would nominate instructors to teach specific courses; choices had to be approved by the Advisory Board. We identified all classes that would be offered as honors and decided to implement the program over six semesters. We began with two classes and added two each semester. At this point, the planning committee disbanded and the coordinator took over. As coordinator, I again turned to the students to isolate the most effective instructional methods and styles. I surveyed one hundred second year students to identify characteristics they wanted in an instructor, teaching methods they believed effective, and behaviors they found ineffective or offensive in a classroom. I asked them to name instructors they would like to see in honors and those they would avoid. I also sent a copy of the philosophy and objectives of our program to all full-time instructors, asked if they were interested in participating, and stated they must be willing to abide by our approach to teach an honors class. Basically, I used this information to guard against placing an instructor in an honors class who did not use the teaching methods we wanted nor suscribed to our "shared learning" concept.

My next project was to identify what we could offer students. The program specified "different learning experiences." Students were to be involved in exploratory learning, collaborative projects, field trips, questioning, computer exercises, and experiemental methods. We did not want lecture-spit back classes. Classes were limited to 15; we wanted intense teacher-student and student-student interaction. Each student in the program was assigned to a mentor, a personal counselor who was to bond the student with NACC and honors. Each mentor had 10 students; the mentors were responsible for the independent projects of his students. The most important thing we did was establish a gathering place--a space that lent identity to this group. The area need not

be on grand scale; we have an office and a small room for the students; it works! In our lounge, we placed two, soon-to-be three, Macintosh SE's and a printer, a refrigerator, a stove, file cabinet, bookcases, a study table, and easy chairs. This room is open any time the building is open and it is always crowded. The students use it to study, tutor each other, chit-chat, carry messages, cry, and become computer game whizzes.

Most of the honors classes are sections of general education courses. In addition, I have developed three classes that have no corresponding regular class. "History of Great Ideas" is a series of 15 seminars on ideas that have shaped western culture; I use a different instructor for each seminar. "Philosophy and the Sciences" traces the parallel development of mankind's thinking and scientific discovery. "Independent Projects" is unique to each student. The student and his mentor design a semester's work in the student's field of study; the mentor submits the proposal to the division chair for approval and the student then brings his project to the advisory board. Students can earn 42 hours credit in honors; they must earn 18 hours to graduate from the program.

I believe our program to be successful. We began our first semester with 25 students; last semester we had 73. We have made several changes in our program; some of the ideas that looked good on paper just did not work in practice. We keep the program flexible to adapt to NACC's changing needs. Of course, we are not without problems; perhaps I should point out some pitfalls. There are some instructors who are not suitable for an honors program. With any luck, these instructors recognize their imcompatibility themselves and cause no problems. Some people,- faculty, classified, right on out to the lawn caretakers - are going to be critics. The reasoning behind the criticism rarely bears inspection: "I never liked honors, they are no smarter than anyone else, just a bunch of teacher pets, and that old favorite, elitism!" I have not found a way to stop criticism; I just make sure it has no validity. There will inevitably be some territoriality surface. I have had to deal with such things as division chairs blocking the schedule or refusing to assign the instructor to honors. Some instructors penalize students for going on field trips.Ironically, the instructor who gives me the most trouble on this point is the same one who must repeatedly take

students out of class himself. On the plus side, I have been very fortunate to have a supportive division chair in my own division and the faculty supporting honors outnumber those who do not. Since I have been working beyond the pale in honors, I have learned little things that make life much easier. It is important to involve as many faculty as possible: use them as teachers, mentors, speakers at luncheons, sponsors for a field trip, resource people. I have been pleasantly surprised to find how many experienced and talented people we have on our own campus. Equally important is thanking individuals for support. Faculty secretaries do a tremendous amount of work for me; the snack bar attendant has been very helpful; the janitor for our area has been so encouraging, the director of our planning office has been vocal in his support and instrumental in equipping our study room with good equipment--all people with no visible connection to honors but who have made a great difference in the success of the program. I like to encourage honor students in every possible way. We have cookie days, birthday cakes by month,idendification cards, luncheons--any excuse we can think of to get together and have fun. The honors students publish a magazine, work in the regional fair, write articles for the local newspaper, and visit area schools. They also sponsor activities on campus for all students; we bring in guest speakers, show films. have receptions for visitors, and participate in community projects. One of the first things we do is acquaint the honors students with college administration. We invite administrators to a luncheon, introduce them , and then "sprinkle" them among the students. We want the students to know those who provide valuable services for this campus. By the end of two or three weeks, we want the students to be over the "Dr. Who?" stage.

From my perspective, the most important thing is to do what works for your institution. Try new things; develop surveys and questionnaires that give you the information you need. Develop evaluation forms that do what you want them to do. Etch the philosophy of your institution and your program firmly across your mind and go. Just keep in mind some things will work; some things will not. Some things will be smashing successes; some will be lukewarm; some will be total disaster; some will make you want to leave town. I personally have never worked harder nor

had more fun in my academic career. The students I work with everyday are intelligent, becoming beings. When they discover they really can ask questions-any questions-they can even question the instructor, they can have a different opinion with no punishment, they can try magnificent tasks, fail and try again, and not flunk out of college, they come alive. A student greeted me with, "I could not wait to get here this morning!" and the whole purpose of honors fell into place.

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PHILOSOPHY, OBJECTIVES, AND RATIONALE

PHILOSOPHY

The Honors Program recognizes its interrelationship with the core program at NACC. Built upon the strengths of the core curriculum, the Honors Program offers the exceptional student further opportunities to develop skills in critical thinking, research, and application of knowledge, specifically guiding him in the exploration of the historical, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds of his discipline. The program provides an atmosphere that stimulates thought, allows freedom of expression, and fosters belief in oneself. The activities and requirements of the program encourage a student to test his limits and to realize his potential as a productive adult.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the Honors Program is to assist the student in becoming a better citizen, to provide him with habits, skills, and attitudes that will enrich his life, and to expose him to ideas and knowledge that have shaped the world. The program further endeavors to open the student's mind so that he relates his experiences and his field of study to the entirety of human experience. To that end, the program has established objectives that each student will accomplish.

1. During his sophomore year, each student will present a paper to a group approved by his advisor.
2. The student will complete an individual project.
3. Each student will read and discuss a specified list of books.
4. Through discussion, the student will focus on his values, consider the values of others, and justify his choices.

5. Through specific activities and projects, the student will apply skills in his major.

6. Through interdepartmental activities, the student will demonstrate a synthesis of areas of knowledge.

7. Each student will participate in group learning and problem solving experiences.

RATIONALE

A community college necessarily meets the needs of the majority of its population. Within this population, there exists a select number of exceptional students capable of performing at levels far above that required by most classroom tasks. An honors program identifies these students, designs activities and studies to challenge their mental abilities, and provides an environment that fosters the development of the students as individuals and as members of society.

PROGRAM DESIGN

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program will be called "Interdisciplinary Issues and Ideas, The Third Level of Learning." The core program will offer in rotation an honors section of all courses requiring three or more sections. These courses are English Composition 101 and 102, General Psychology 160, U.S. History 201 and 202, Introduction to Sociology 100, College Algebra 140, Oral Communication 100, Introduction to Data Processing 110, and Fundamental Biology 100 Laboratory. The program will also offer four new courses: Individual Projects, History of Ideas, Great Books, and Philosophy and the Sciences. Class size will be limited to 15 for all honors classes except Individual Projects. Because of the depth of study and degree of involvement in this class, enrollment is limited to 10.

In addition to classes, the honors program will sponsor special activities such as field trips, seminars, guest speakers, and concentrated studies. These activities will be open to students not in the honors program as space permits.

IMPLEMENTATION

The program will be phased in over a period of six semesters, beginning in the fall, 1988. The schedule of implementation is as follows:

May 15, 1988	submit course outlines and syllabi for fall courses
Fall, 1988	English Composition 101 General Psychology 160 Individual Projects
October 15, 1988	submit course outlines and syllabi for spring courses
Spring, 1989	English Composition 102 Introduction to Sociology 100
March 15, 1989	submit course outlines and syllabi for fall courses
Fall, 1989	Philosophy and the Sciences Fundamental Biology Lab 100 United States History 201
October 15, 1989	submit course outlines and syllabi for spring courses
Spring, 1990	United States History 202 Great Books
March 15, 1990	submit course outlines and syllabi for fall courses
Fall, 1990	History of Ideas College Algebra
October 15, 1990	submit course outlines and syllabi for fall courses

Spring, 1991 . . . . . Introduction to Data Processing 210
Oral Communication 100

Any other course of particular interest to students and/or faculty will be considered for the program.

As the program is being phased in, the courses will be designated honors on the students' transcripts with no indication on the diplomas. The committee anticipates no honors graduates until the program has been in place two years.

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Any student with less than 12 hours college credit applying for admission to NACC who has an ACT composite score of 22 and an overall 3.3 gpa will receive an invitation to participate in the honors program. A student not meeting these criteria may request admission through a personal interview with the director and the honors faculty.

A student with 12 or more hours of college credit must have a 3.3 gpa to be considered for admission to the honors program. Any student maintaining a 3.3 gpa may participate in the honors program; however, to graduate with honors he must complete 18 hours of honors classes, three of which must be Individual Projects. A student not in the honors program may take an honors course with permission of the instructor.

When a student enters the program, he will be assigned to an honors faculty member. This faculty member will be the student's mentor and project director as long as the student is in the program.

To remain in the program a student must maintain a 3.3 gpa with only one semester probation. He also must participate in one honors activity per semester.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

For a student to graduate with honors, he must complete 18 hours in honors courses, three of which must be Individual Projects. He must also have participated in one honors activity per semester and maintained a 3.3 gpa. His faculty mentor will have all this information in a folder and will verify the student has met the requirements.

ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR

The honors program will be administered by a director who will report directly to the vice president of instruction. The director will have his annual contract extended one month, two weeks before and after the regular term. He will also have one release period each semester. The director will coordinate the implementation and operation of the program. His specific duties are outlined in Appendix A.

ADVISORY BOARD

The director will sit on the advisory board. Other members of the board shall include two faculty members from separate disciplines, the vice president of instruction, a student in the honors program, and two people from the community. The faculty members will be appointed by the vice president of instruction; the student and community members will be nominated and approved by all the faculty.

The board shall act as advisor to the director. Its primary functions shall be to evaluate the honors program and recommend policy changes, to review course outlines and approve courses, to recommend faculty to teach honors courses, and to publicize the program.

FACULTY

Any member of the faculty may volunteer to teach an honors course. The director may invite an instructor to teach a course. All faculty names will be submitted to the advisory board; final approval rests with the vice president of instruction.

RECORDS

An honors course will be identified on the student's transcript with an "H" following the course number. A graduate of the program will have a seal on his diploma and receive an honor cord and tassle.

As a student enters the program, he will be assigned to a faculty mentor, a maximum of ten students per mentor. Each mentor will keep a folder for each student assigned to him. He will keep a record of the student's classes, special projects, participation in activities, and grades. The mentor and the student will negotiate the student's individual project, and the mentor will monitor the student's progress as long as the student remains in the program. A student may be assigned to a different mentor by special request to the director and with approval of both mentors involved. The mentors report to the director.

COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL

Each honors course will have a course outline and syllabus. The honors sections of current courses will cover the material from the regular course and more. The major differences will be in the teaching techniques.

The course outlines and syllabi will be developed by the instructor of the course. He will submit both to the appropriate division chairperson and the advisory board. The chairperson will indicate his approval or suggest changes to the board. The outline and syllabus will be approved by the division chairperson and the advisory board. In the case of new courses the director will then submit this material to the Curriculum Committee for approval.

Honors sections of established courses should be accepted at senior institutions without any further action. After the four new classes have been approved by NACC, they will pass through the established articulation process with other institutions. According to current articulation agreements, institutions involved will accept a philosophy, any literature, and a history course. The Individual Projects will be coordinated with the student's major.

EVALUATION

Faculty teaching in the honors program will be evaluated by the vice president of instruction. As part of the procedure students will fill out a questionnaire on the faculty member; these forms will pass directly to the vice president of instruction.

The advisory board will evaluate specific courses and the overall program. Criteria will include student participation, student critiques of specific courses, student retention, and student success following graduation from NACC. The intent of evaluation will always be to adapt the program to better serve the students.

MARKETING

The director and honors faculty shall develop an attractive recruitment brochure to distribute to area high schools and mail with applications for admission to NACC. For the first semester, the director and faculty members will travel to area schools to present the program. The Director of Public Information will include the honors program in press releases and radio spots.

After the first semester, students in the honors program will be used in recruiting. They also will be sharing their work with the community through various civic organizations.

BUDGET

PERSONNEL

Director:	
1 month extended contract	2000.
3 hour release time replacement	1850.

OPERATING EXPENSE

Brochures	500.
Supplies	500.
Telephone	300.
DIALOG -- user fee	1800.

TRAVEL

National Honors Council Meeting (3-4 faculty and students)	1200.
Recruitment visits	750.

EQUIPMENT

Computer terminal	1500.
Furniture for resource room	500.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS	1000.
	$11,900.00

APPENDIX A

DUTIES OF THE DIRECTOR

1. Recruit students.
2. Publicize the program.
3. Develop a brochure and other marketing devices.
4. Coordinate the development and approval of honors course outlines.
5. Coordinate the offering and scheduling of honors courses with other college courses.
6. Counsel students.
7. Coordinate the articulation of the honors courses with senior institutions.
8. Develop a network of support-resource people.
9. Develop and coordinate special activites for the students.
10. Develop and administer an annual budget.
11. Develop a scholarship network.
12. Develop and moniter a reading-resource room.
13. Evaluate the program.
14. Develop and maintain a student record keeping and tracking system.
15. Develop a training program for faculty mentors.
16. Encourage students not in honors program to participate in honors classes.
17. Maintain active involvement in state and national honors organizations.
18. Coordinate the activities of the Advisory Board.

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